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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5272  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1166  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9933  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4358  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1821  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3554  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0518  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7032  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4651  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0928  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0932  
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0662  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2881  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0533  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001512

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: KACHINS BET ON THE NATIONAL CONVENTION PROCESS

REF: RANGOON 1475

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Classified By: PolOff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) delegate to the National Convention believes the ethnics must try to strike the best possible deal with the regime via the National Convention and try to amend the constitution later, following a period of confidence building. He thinks violent opposition to the regime would again be brutally crushed and that current pro-democracy forces lack adequate experience to lead the country. By betting on the regime's scripted constitution process, the KIO leadership is gambling that the people it represents will accept its less than courageous stance. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Prior to the opening of the GOB's latest session of the National Convention (NC), KIO vice chairman Dr. Tu Jar described to Embassy staff the organization's rationale for participating in the regime's tightly choreographed process to draft a new constitution. Dr. Tu Jar said the KIO Executive Committee had decided in 1992 that key national issues could only be solved through dialogue, not on the battlefield. Having made this decision, the KIO signed a cease-fire agreement with the SPDC in 1994 and agreed to participate in the NC after the SPDC announced its "seven step road map" to democracy in 2003. He explained that the KIO had expected the process to be more transparent and open to international scrutiny.

13. (C) Dr. Tu Jar said that through its participation in the NC, the KIO has discovered what is most important to the various interest groups attending the Convention. For the ethnic minorities, he said, some form of autonomy under federalism remains the key objective. The SPDC is primarily concerned about maintaining a military dominated power

sharing system. The political parties engaged in the NC place achievement of democracy atop their agenda. Tu Jar admitted that ethnic representatives' proposals at the NC were not adopted, nor even discussed, but consoled himself that at least the regime registered their concerns. He also said that it remains unclear whether any legislative power will exist at the state level, as states under the current script are only allowed to have state councils with very limited autonomy.

#### REALISM VS. IDEALISM

14. (C) According to Tu Jar, the KIO participates in the NC because it feels it is more important to be realistic than idealistic. KIO leaders assume the regime will push through its road map regardless of obstacles. While the KIO does not want to condone long-term military government rule, it believes it is important to support any plan that allows at least a small amount of power sharing as preferable to the status quo. The KIO also hopes to be able to amend the constitution in the future to allow for greater democracy. Tu Jar believes that the military will only demand 25 percent of the seats in a future parliament, leaving 75 percent for civilians. He also surmised that military parliamentarians would only seek to control the Ministries of Defense, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs and National Races, while civilians would run the other ministries.

15. (C) Despite going along with the regime in the NC process, the KIO refused the SPDC's request to issue a statement condemning the United States for placing Burma on the UNSC agenda (reftel). Dr. Tu Jar admitted that the Kachin may have to suffer the consequences, but the KIO showed it is willing take a stand against the regime on selected issues.

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#### A TIME FOR CONFIDENCE BUILDING

16. (C) Dr. Tu Jar admitted that a lack of trust remains a basic obstacle to bringing democracy to Burma. The ethnic Burman majority still feels that ethnic minorities only want to tear the union apart. At the same time, the minorities feel that Burmans look down on them and do not want them to share power on an equitable basis. Additionally, the military fears that a civilian government will seek reprisals for decades of military abuse and misrule. Tu Jar said that, after a period under a new constitution, different groups might begin to develop greater confidence in one another and help move toward greater democracy. He cited Thailand and Indonesia as countries where the transition from military rule to civilian rule has been gradual. He ruled out returning to the battlefield, or relying on a public uprising to fight for democracy because the military would again brutally crush any resistance. Tu Jar also told us that he believes the opposition has no experienced leaders who could lead the country.

17. (C) COMMENT: The KIO optimistically joined the NC process only to discover the only scriptwriter is the regime. Since the KIO signed a cease-fire with the SPDC, the regime has exerted increasing control over Kachin State's rich natural resources and gem trade, and replaced Kachins with ethnic Burmans in most key government and administrative positions in the state. If the KIO fails to gain any significant autonomy through its NC participation, and the signals are not promising, its frustrated constituency may lose faith in current leadership and end the cease-fire agreement that has given them few tangible benefits so far. Kachin youth face severe unemployment and many are already tempted by drugs or better prospects across the border in China. While senior leaders (who have been compensated by the military) are unwilling to fight for their rights, young people have little to lose. END COMMENT.  
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